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REMARKS

Claims 5-8 and 15-20, 22-23, and 25-39 are pending in this application. Applicants have amended Claims 18 and 22; cancelled Claims 4 and 21 without prejudice; and presented new Claims 26-39 for the Examiner's consideration. Applicants request consideration of this application in view of the following remarks.

Claims 5-8 and 15-20, 22-23, and 25 stand rejected as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 5,736,982 to Suzuki et al. ("Suzuki"). The virtual space system of Suzuki includes a plurality of terminals that are connected to a server via a communication network. The terminals each send to the server the positions of the viewing point and direction of eyes of its user in the virtual space. Based on the positions and direction of eyes of the avatars of the other terminals received from the other terminals via the server, each terminal generates an avatar image in the specified direction and at the specified position and displays it in the visual field. The server receives the latest position information of the avatar from each terminal and, when the distance between two arbitrary avatars becomes smaller than a threshold value, connects speech channels of the two terminals corresponding to these avatars.

Suzuki thus teaches establishing a speech channel between two terminals based on the positions of the avatars of the terminals. Importantly, however, Suzuki does not teach or suggest using a terminal to determine, based on the positions of the avatars of the other terminals, which of those avatars to display.

For the following reasons, Applicants respectfully traverse the rejections based on Suzuki:

Unlike Suzuki, Claim 5 is directed to a method for enabling a first user to interact with other users in a virtual space. The first user and the other users each have an avatar and a client process associated therewith and each client process is in communication with a server process.

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The method includes (a) receiving a position of at least some of the other users' avatars from the server process and (b) determining, from the received positions, a set of the other users' avatars that are to be displayed to the first user. The steps (a) and (b) are performed by the client process associated with the first user. Claim 5, and Claims 6-8 and 24, which depend therefrom, are patentable over Suzuki and the other references of record because they fail to teach or suggest such a method.

Also unlike Suzuki, Claim 15 is directed to a method for enabling two users to interact in a virtual space. The first user has a first computer associated therewith, the first computer has a first client process associated therewith, and the first client process has a first avatar associated therewith. The second user has a second computer associated therewith, the second computer has a second client process associated therewith, and the second client process has a second avatar associated therewith. Further, the first and second client processes are in communication with a server process.

The method includes the steps of (a) monitoring a position of the first and second avatars by the first and second client processes, respectively; (b) transmitting the positions of the first and second avatars by the first and second client processes, respectively, to the server process; (c) transmitting the positions of the first and second avatars, by the server process, to the second and first client processes, respectively; and (d) determining, by the second and first client processes, from the positions of the first and second avatars, respectively, whether to display the first and second avatars. Claim 15, and Claims 16-17 which depend therefrom, are thus patentable over Suzuki and the other references of record because they fail to teach or suggest such a method.

Amended Claim 18 differs from Suzuki because it is directed to a method for enabling a plurality of users to interact in a virtual space. Each user has a computer associated therewith,

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each computer has a client process associated therewith, each client process has an avatar associated therewith, and each client process is in communication with a server process.

The method includes (a) monitoring, by each client process, a position of the avatar associated with the client process; (b) transmitting, by each client process to the server process, the position of the avatar associated with the client process; (c) transmitting, by the server process to each client process, the positions of at least some of the avatars that are not associated with the client process; and (d) determining from the positions transmitted in step (c), by each client process, at least some of the avatars that are not associated with the client process that are to be displayed. Claim 18, and Claims 19-20 which depend therefrom, are thus patentable over Suzuki and the other references of record because they fail to teach or suggest such a method.

Applicants note that the amendment to Claim 18 is intended to better define the relationship between steps (c) and (d) and was not made for the purposes of patentability.

Claim 22 is patentable over Suzuki because is directed to a method for operating a server to enable a plurality of users to interact in a virtual space. Each user has a computer associated therewith, each computer has a client process associated therewith, and each client process has an avatar associated therewith. The server has a process associated therewith and each client process is in communication with the server process.

The method includes (a) receiving, from each client process by the server process, data indicating a position of the avatar associated with the client process and (b) synchronously disseminating the positions of the avatars not associated with a particular client process to each of the other client processes so that the particular client process can determine from the positions a set of avatars that are to be displayed. Claim 22 is thus patentable over Suzuki and the other references of record because they fail to teach or suggest such a method.

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Applicants note that the amendments to Claim 22 are intended to better define the invention thereof and were not made for the purposes of patentability.

Unlike Suzuki, Claim 23 is directed to an apparatus for enabling a first user to interact with other users in a virtual space. The first user and the other users each have an avatar associated therewith. The apparatus includes a first process associated with the first user and other client processes associated with the other users. It also includes a server process in communication with the first client process and the other client processes.

Each of the other client processes is operable to monitor a position of the avatar associated with the other user and transmit the position of the avatar to the server process. The server process is operable to receive the positions of the avatars associated with the other users and transmit the positions of the avatars associated with at least some of the other users to the first client process. The first client process is operable to receive the positions of the avatars associated with at least some of the other users and determine from the received positions a set of the other users' avatars that are to be displayed. Claim 23 is thus patentable over Suzuki and the other references of record because they fail to teach or suggest such an apparatus.

Concerning Claim 25, which stands rejected as being anticipated by Suzuki for the reasons set forth for Claims 5 and 8, Applicants submit that Claim 25, and Claims 26-28 and 36 which depend therefrom, are patentable for the same reasons stated with respect to Claims 5 and 8.

Claims 30, 32, 35 are based on Claims 15, 18, and 22, respectively, and thus are patentable over Suzuki and the other references of record for the same reasons. Claims 31, 33, 34, and 37-39, which depend from Claims 30, 32, and 35, therefore are also patentable.

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For the reasons set forth above, all of the pending claims are patentable over the references of record and are now in condition for allowance. An early allowance of the all claims is earnestly solicited.

Dated: December 2, 2004

Respectfully submitted,

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